

Over the next few years, new elements were added to the legend: The golden man rode a raft out onto a sacred lake and offered a sacrifice of gold and jewels, dumping them into the water. The native trader telling the story was now a citizen of Bogotá, Colombia. All this served to whet the conquistadors' appetite for riches.

The Quests for El Dorado

Gonzalo Pizarro, a Spanish explorer, was the first to undertake a great expedition in search of cinnamon trees and the land of El Dorado. In 1541, he gathered more than 200 Spanish soldiers and 4,000 native slaves and set off eastward from Quito. Typical of the conquistadors, Pizarro was a ruthless leader. When the quest remained fruitless, with no end to the dense, hilly forests and no rich, flat lands in sight, Pizarro commanded his men to torture the Indians until they revealed the secret location of El Dorado. Under Pizarro's command, the Spaniards put hundreds of Indians to death, stretched on racks, burned, or thrown to the dogs. Still, the mysterious land of El Dorado eluded him.



**Gonzalo Pizarro
(1506–1548)**

One local chief, Delicola, had heard of Pizarro's cruelty. When the explorer came through, Delicola made plans to avoid the torture of his people. He told Pizarro that the rich lands were further down the Napo River. Pizarro was excited to hear this good news and pushed on, but his men found nothing. Other Indian leaders were not so clever; within two months, Pizarro had captured the chiefs of four different tribes and threatened to kill them if they did not help him find El Dorado. The chiefs swore that there was a wealthy land up a river to the east and then made their escape.

The Spaniards were having a rough time as well. Pizarro had led them into the untamed Amazon rain forests, where they had to hack through the dense foliage. They were plagued by mosquitoes and vampire bats, by alligators and snakes, and by an evil fog that seemed to carry disease. They became so hungry that they ate their horses and the soles of their shoes. Hundreds died along the way.

Pizarro eventually returned to Quito without finding the fabled city of El Dorado. He regretted ever beginning the quest. Yet his failure did nothing to deter others from setting forth. Another Spaniard, Quesada, and a German explorer, von Hutton, both led expeditions in search of gold that year. Over the next century, dozens of parties would set out looking for the mythical land; all of them failed. Even the famous British explorer Sir Walter Raleigh, ignoring the perils of the jungle and the poor results of other attempts, undertook two unsuccessful quests to find El Dorado. On the second trip, Raleigh's son Wat was killed, and Raleigh returned to England in shame.